



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE FALL AND ITS CONSEQUENCES ACCORDING TO GENESIS, CHAPTER 3.

By H. G. MITCHELL,
Boston.

A COMPLETE discussion of the Fall would require a threefold treatment: (1) an analysis of Genesis, chap. 3, for the purpose of determining its exact teaching; (2) a comparison of the Hebrew story with any similar traditions among other peoples, for the purpose of discovering its relation to them; and (3) an examination of the doctrine of the story in the light of all the knowledge on the subject obtainable, for the purpose of determining its theological value. The present paper, as its title is meant to indicate, will deal only with the first of these topics. Indeed its scope will be still further limited. Since it has been satisfactorily (to the writer) shown that the Jahwist's account of Paradise originally contained but one miraculous tree, and that the second is an interpolation, the tree of life will be ignored or only incidentally mentioned; in other words, the object will be to show what Gen., chap. 3, in its original form taught concerning the Fall and its consequences.¹

At the outset the question forces itself upon one, whether the story of the Fall is meant for history or allegory; *i. e.*, whether its author therein attempts to describe the actual experience of a first man and woman or simply to hold a mirror

¹ The reasons for pronouncing the tree of life an interpolation are briefly: that (1) the references to it have all the marks of textual corruptions; (2) it is entirely ignored throughout most of the story; and (3) it is not a necessary part of the narrative. The changes in the text required to restore it to what, so far as the tree of life is involved, is supposed to have been its original form, are the following: In chap. 2: 9 omit *the tree of life* and the *and after garden*, and in vs. 17 for *the knowledge of good and evil* read, as in 3: 3, *which is in the midst of the garden*. In chap. 3 omit vss. 20, 22, and 24, and for vs. 22 substitute 6: 3. For a detailed discussion of these changes see BUDDE, *Biblische Urgeschichte*, pp. 46 ff., and compare B. W. BACON, *Genesis of Genesis*, pp. 227 ff., 338 f.

up to human experience in general. The tendency among later exegetes seems to be in favor of the latter opinion.² It is, of course, impossible to decide this question in advance of the investigation proposed, but it will not be improper to adopt a provisional standpoint, and give one or two reasons for its adoption. It seems fair, then, to assume that the author of this chapter, when he wrote it, aimed to give his readers a literal explanation of the origin of evil in the world, because (1) it is in accordance with his habit as observed in the rest of his work to do so. Reuss admits (*A. T.*, III, pp. 208f.) that the story in its present setting must be taken literally. The same, however, can be said of it as a part of the Jahwistic document; and that, not only on the strength of 2: 10-15, which is now generally regarded as a later edition, but also in view of such passages as 6: 1 f., 4 and 11: 1 ff., where current myths have evidently been transformed into supposed history. If, therefore, the story sometimes smacks of the mythical, this fact should be utilized to explain its origin rather than to determine its interpretation. (2) The standpoint adopted is warranted also by the closeness of the relation between this and following passages undoubtedly meant to be taken in a literal sense. A passage from the history of Noah will serve as an illustration. There can be no doubt that the original Jahwist meant to represent him as a historical character. But in 5: 29 the conditions into which he is born are explained as the result of the curse pronounced upon the earth after the Fall. And, when one stops to think, one cannot conceive of the author as basing the structure which he evidently purposes to rear on any but the most solid foundations.³

These are the reasons for assuming that the story in question should be interpreted literally. As the discussion proceeds it will appear that this is the only standpoint from which it can be understood.

² See REUSS, *Altes Testament*, III, pp. 199 ff.

³ By a similar line of reasoning it can be shown that the view, adopted by some timid interpreters, according to which the first chapter of Genesis is to be treated as poetry, and not as history, is utterly without foundation.

I. The first step in the inquiry is to ascertain, if possible, what, according to the Jahwist, was the original condition of man. For this purpose the preceding chapter also must be consulted.

When Jehovah made man he put him into a garden furnished with "every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food" (2:9). This implies, what the sequel only too clearly teaches (3:6), that man, as he came from the hand of his Creator, was endowed with the capacity to enjoy the world into which he had been ushered. A little later he manifested signs of possessing a considerable degree of intellectual power; for, when Jehovah brought to him the beasts that had been created to keep him company, he was able not only to perceive that they all differed from himself, but also to give to each of them the name that fitted its nature. The woman shared this second, as well as the first, capacity with her husband, for she was able to balance motives and eager to increase her powers. The social instinct manifested itself in the first man as soon as he was created, and, when Jehovah, declaring that it was not good for him to be alone, made him a companion, the pair, although they seem not at first to have recognized a sexual distinction between them, immediately developed a fitting attachment for each other. Finally, it is evident that the author meant to picture these first human beings as endowed with free wills, or the ability to determine their own actions and destinies.

Such, according to the Jahwist, was the equipment of the race at its origin. It lacked only one of its subsequent endowments, "the knowledge of good and evil." What is meant by this expression? Wellhausen (*Prolegomena*, p. 318) insists that, in good and evil, not a moral distinction in actions, but a classification of things as helpful or harmful, is intended, and that a knowledge of them is only another name for culture, civilization. This view is opposed by Budde (*Biblische Urgeschichte*, pp. 65 ff.) who bases his contention that a moral distinction is intended on two considerations: (1) that, granting that *good* and *evil* originally had a purely utilitarian application, when the Jahwistic document was written they had evidently acquired a

moral signification (Amos 5: 14 f.), which finally appears in expressions similar to, or identical with, the one in question (2 Sam. 14: 17; 1 Kings 3: 9); and (2) that in the story of the Fall the application of the terms to moral qualities is proven by the fact that the first knowledge actually acquired by Adam and Eve was that of their own nakedness.

The position taken by Budde seems the correct one, and his arguments valid. There is another line of reasoning to the same conclusion. It may be urged (1) that the lack of the knowledge of good and evil, whatever these terms may mean, evidently implies the lack of the capacity to distinguish between them; but (2) that, in this case, the application of the terms to moral qualities appears from the fact that, in the threat attached to the prohibition of the tree in question, the capacity to distinguish between things advantageous and disadvantageous is taken for granted. What would have been the use of the declaration, "In the day when thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (2: 17), if he to whom the words were addressed had no notion of the desirable as distinguished from the undesirable?

The first man and woman, therefore, according to the Jahwist, although they were otherwise perfectly equipped, were originally without the capacity to distinguish for themselves between right and wrong; in other words, were in the condition of children who, as the saying is, have not arrived at the age of accountability. Further than this, they were forbidden to eat of the tree the fruit of which would bring them to moral maturity. This prohibition has puzzled the commentators. Budde (*B. U.*, p. 72) suggests that possibly it was only a temporary regulation; that perhaps Jehovah would finally have permitted man to partake of the tree if he had proven obedient, and secured him against any evil consequences. The favorite opinion on the point, however, is that, had the temptation been resisted, the result would have been the development in the first pair, thus voluntarily choosing good, of a knowledge of the distinction between it and its opposite, or, as Strack (*Genesis*, p. 15) puts it, "Had he (man) withstood the temptation, he would have known that he had remained loyal to the will of God, *i. e.*,

good, and kept himself aloof from evil. He would, thus, without partaking of the fruit, by overcoming temptation have attained the knowledge of good and evil, only in a very different and not maleficent manner." Delitzsch (*Genesis*, p. 97) and Dillmann (*Genesis*, p. 69) coincide in this view, and even Budde (*B. U.*, p. 74) regards it as preferable to the one previously suggested.

Both of these views, however, are the product of a false method of interpretation, and clearly mistaken. The question for the present is not, what must have been Jehovah's motive, but what is expressed or implied with reference to it in the language of the story. The author of it says simply that Jehovah forbade the man to partake of the tree, and, in the absence of an indication of any sort to the contrary, the prohibition must be understood as absolute. But if the first man could not hope ever to be *permitted* to enjoy the forbidden fruit, there is even less reason for asserting that, according to the Jahwist, he could ever have acquired the knowledge of good and evil in any other way. The "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" was evidently so called because it possessed the property of imparting the capacity for making moral distinctions. The author himself says that this property resided in the fruit of the tree and that it was manifested when the fruit was eaten, and he is absolutely silent as to any other method of attaining the same result. The theory, therefore, that, if the first pair had not eaten of the forbidden fruit, the tree would have had any influence upon their moral condition, is as gratuitous as to suppose that they could have satisfied their hunger by sitting under the shadow of the other trees of the garden.

What, then, is the explanation of the prohibition in question? Having found the ingenious theories quoted unsatisfactory, is it not best to adopt the conclusion that would naturally occur to the unsophisticated reader, viz., that Jehovah forbade the first man and woman to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because, although he had made a contrary choice possible, it was his will that they should remain in the condition in which they had been created, and that, therefore, if they had

not disobeyed, they would always have remained in that condition ?

There now arises the further question, why Jehovah should not be willing to permit his favorite creatures the knowledge of good and evil. To this also there have been various answers. It has been asserted, *e. g.*, that the author of the story, influenced by the ideas concerning their gods current among the surrounding peoples, intends to represent Jehovah as moved by jealousy in the matter ; but it is doubtful if there is really any ground for this opinion. The words put into the mouth of Jehovah in vs. 22 cannot be quoted in support of it, since, as has already been stated, they did not belong to the original form of the story. The case with vs. 5 is different, but it does not favor the view in question. Indeed, if, as is probable, the declaration of the serpent implies a charge of jealousy, the fact that the charge is made by the tempter indicates that the author intended it to be taken as a misrepresentation. On the other hand, in view of 11 : 6, it is hardly safe to say that the Jahwist thought of Jehovah in this case as acting from a purely benevolent motive. It is more probable that, in his mind, the ideal, and therefore the original, relation of man to God was one of absolute dependence, and that the latter in denying the former the knowledge of good and evil was asserting his prerogative as Creator, as well as attempting to secure the best interest of his creature.

To the fully developed man of the present day the original condition of the race, as depicted in the third chapter of Genesis, was not an enviable one, but the author of the chapter evidently took a different view of it. To him it doubtless seemed better to be without the troublesome power to decide for oneself in matters of right and wrong. It was much simpler to live by the word proceeding from the mouth of Jehovah. True, one could not be good in the fullest sense of the term, but one could forego that possibility, especially since goodness of the childlike kind was rewarded by the most abundant blessings that one at the date of the story could imagine. Was it not enough to enjoy the best that the earth could produce, without toil or pain, or,

so long as the single condition on which it all depended was fulfilled, anxiety lest the happiness enjoyed should ever come to an end?

II. How long the first pair remained obedient to the divine will and enjoyed the delights of the garden in Eden, does not appear. The impression left by the story is that not much time had passed before a great change was wrought in them and their circumstances. In this change three factors were involved. There was, first, the tree with its forbidden fruit, the means by which the knowledge of good and evil was ultimately attained. It seems to have had no office apart from the event of the Fall, for, although the likeness of this story to certain myths current among other peoples naturally suggests the question whether the author did not think of the tree as explaining the possession by Jehovah and his celestial associates of the capacity denied man, the fact that the tree did not exist until man was created (2:7, 9) makes such a supposition decidedly improbable. The safer view is that the Jahwist, believing, as has been suggested, that childhood was the ideal state, represented it as the original condition of the race, and, without further thought as to its fitness in the connection, introduced the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, suggested, perhaps, by the symbolic trees of ethnic religions, to explain how the first man and woman attained moral maturity. To the question whether Jehovah, by putting the tree in their way, did not make himself responsible for their disobedience, he would doubtless have replied that the second factor, the freedom of the first pair to eat or refrain from eating, especially in view of the penalty attached to its improper exercise, relieved their Maker of any such responsibility. At any rate, their freedom is taken for granted.

It was not enough for the author's purpose, however, that the object forbidden was desirable and the persons involved free to elect to enjoy it. The force of the penalty threatened, which would naturally operate to prevent disobedience, must, in some way consistent with his ideas of Jehovah, be weakened. This is the office of the third factor, the serpent.

The first question, of course, is, Who or what was the ser-

pent? Those who adopt the allegorical interpretation of the story declare that it cannot have been the animal of that name, and risk their theory largely on their ability to make this assertion good. Unfortunately, however, this theory will not bear thoughtful application. Reuss, *e. g.* (*A. T.*, III, pp. 206 f.), claims that the serpent is a personification of the instinct that impels man to emerge from the condition of childhood, but he does not attempt to explain what is meant by the curse pronounced upon the serpent. In fact he says that it has no real significance, which is equivalent to saying that his interpretation fails to interpret. The view of Schultz (*Alttestamentliche Theologie*, pp. 609 ff.), that the serpent symbolizes the animal principle in man, is, if anything, still less satisfactory; for (1) the author of the story evidently did not distinguish between two or more species of life in man, but thought of all life as a simple manifestation of the spirit of Jehovah in the human form (see 2:7; 6:3). (2) On the supposition that he did make such a distinction he cannot have meant the serpent to be a symbol of the animal life, since, although the woman takes note of the fact that the tree is delightful to the eyes and its fruit apparently good for food, the serpent takes no account of these attractions, but presents the higher advantages to be obtained through the tree (3:5). (3) This view renders the author's statements concerning the penalties inflicted confusing and unintelligible. Did Jehovah punish the first pair first figuratively and then literally?

Another theory with reference to the serpent is that it was a mask for Satan. Delitzsch is very strenuous in his insistence upon this interpretation. He says (*Genesis*, p. 98) that, if the doctrine that man fell from the favorable position in which he was placed at his creation through seduction by Satan be abandoned, nothing is left in the place of the religion of redemption, restoration, and perfection but a rationalistic, *i. e.*, anti-supernaturalistic, deism. One shrinks from differing from this sainted teacher or criticising him and his fervent statements, but it would be impossible to accept his interpretation at this point even if, which must also be denied, the alternative that he presents were the only one, and for the following reasons: (1) There is

nowhere in the language used any evidence that a concealed personality was in the mind of the writer. (2) If it were admitted that the serpent was a mask for some other being, there would still be good ground for denying that the being supposed was Satan; for (a) the doctrine of Satan as an evil power opposed to the Deity is considerably later than the story of the Fall (*cf.* 2 Sam. 24:1 and 1 Chron. 21:1; see also Piepenbring, *Theology of the Old Testament* pp. 256 ff.); and (b) the introduction of a positively evil being would have forestalled the very object of the story, viz., to explain the origin of evil in the world. (3) This interpretation also, like the allegorical, breaks down when applied to the penalty inflicted on the serpent; for, either (a) the serpent alone is punished, and the power of which it was the tool overlooked, or (b) Satan is condemned to a degradation which hardly harmonizes with his subsequent position as a son of God and member of the heavenly court. See Job 1:6.

If, now, the serpent is neither a figure of thought nor a mask for Satan, the presumption is that it is to be understood as a real animal. That this is the correct view appears from the following considerations: (1) It is distinctly classified among the beasts of the field, *i. e.*, wild animals (3:1). (2) It is described by a mark, cunning, that belongs, or has always popularly been supposed to belong, to actual serpents. See Matt. 10:16. (3) The object of the author required the introduction of a tempter that could not be called wicked. (4) The penalty inflicted upon the serpent exactly fits the animal of that name, and corresponds to those inflicted upon the man and the woman. There are, of course, objections, *e. g.*, that it is ridiculous to suppose that the serpent ever had the power of speech, or any other form than that in which it now appears; but they have no weight against the interpretation proposed, since the question now is, not what were the original form and capacity of this animal, but how this author conceived of it. If it be objected further that the Jahwist could not have had any such notion of the serpent as that supposed, it is only necessary to remind the objector that a serpent that talks can hardly be called more wonderful than a tree with the property of imparting the knowledge of good and evil.

The tempter of Gen., chap. 3, then, is an animal, with the characteristics popularly attributed to, but not the actual body of, the serpent, and its part in the story is intended to explain the union of so subtle a nature with the repulsive form in which it is now embodied. The scene between it and the woman is very skillfully managed. Jehovah had said that, if she and her husband ate of the tree in the midst of the garden,—the proper name of the tree was not given to it in the original form of the story,—they should surely die, or, to put it differently, as surely as they ate of the tree they should die. Thus they had the best of reasons for shunning the tree and none for meddling with its fruit. When the serpent appears its first move is to deny what Jehovah has asserted. "Ye shall not surely die," it said, and from one point of view the denial was justified; viz., on the supposition that the woman understood that death would be the direct and immediate effect of partaking of the forbidden fruit. This, as the sequel shows, was not what Jehovah meant, but the serpent cunningly takes his own interpretation for granted, and proceeds to disclose what will be the effect of indulgence: "Your eyes," he says, "shall be opened, and ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil." This announcement,—which was literally true,—by bringing before her mind a great present advantage, causes the woman to forget what is now, at most, a remote consequence of disobedience, and may, perhaps, after all, be only a bugbear. She yields to the serpent's suggestion, takes of the fruit, and finally persuades her husband to share her transgression.

The objection will doubtless be made that the serpent is, after all, an evil character. It must, however, be remembered that the author distinctly describes it as a beast of the field, and, further, that this same writer, apparently without disapproval, relates that the best of the patriarchs used deception to accomplish their purposes, for it is he who represents Isaac as lying to retain Rebecca (Gen. 24: 7) and Jacob as first getting Esau's birthright (27: 19), and finally Laban's property (30: 36 ff.), by indirection. If any further evidence that deception was not regarded as a sin by the early sacred writers is necessary, 1 Kings 22: 19 ff.,

the passage in which Micaiah pictures Jehovah as sending a lying spirit to deceive Ahab to his ruin, ought to be sufficient. See Piepenbring, *T. O. T.*, pp. 34 ff.

III. The man and his wife alike disobeyed. What followed? On this third point the author is very explicit,—and so are the theologians. So many of the latter, however, seem to have missed the meaning of the former that it will be best to depend upon the original authority. What, then, does the Jahwist report as having happened when the two had eaten of the forbidden fruit? “The eyes,” he says, “of both were opened,” and then he explains this expression by adding, “and they knew that they were naked” (3:7). In vs. 5 the same expression is explained by the addition of, “and ye shall be as God,” and this, in turn, by the further addition of, “knowing good and evil.” It is clear, therefore, that immediately upon eating of the forbidden fruit the words of the serpent were fulfilled, and Adam and Eve acquired the power hitherto denied, which at once manifested itself in their recognition of their nakedness. Their next move was to make themselves “girdles.” It has been held that the emotion which may be supposed to have followed the recognition of their nude condition, and impelled them to clothe themselves, was shame in the bad sense of the term. Thus Dillmann (*Genesis*, p. 73), commenting on this passage, says, “Without sin there is no shame.” This, however, can hardly have been the idea of the author. He is tracing the operation of the newly acquired faculty. In so doing he ignores, for the time being, the means by which it has been acquired, and seemingly intends to convey the impression that Adam and Eve themselves forgot it. The emotion which they experienced, therefore, cannot, in his mind, have been of the kind alleged, but must have been conceived of as the natural confusion at discovering oneself naked which is perfectly consistent with innocence. This conclusion is favored by the following context. The author says that, when, at the close of the day, Jehovah was heard approaching, the man and his wife hid themselves among the trees of the garden, and that the man, on being called, excused his disappearance by saying, “I was afraid because I was naked” (3:10). This statement is

best interpreted as giving the real reason for their flight; for Adam, being virtually a child, should return an artless answer, and such an answer is required to make the scene from the literary point of view worthy of the Jahwist. See Gen., chap. 44. If, however, the author intended to represent Adam as so artlessly betraying himself, he must have imagined the pair so preoccupied with their new faculty that, like children, they were oblivious of everything else.

The question, "Who told thee that thou wast naked?" brings the man face to face with the penalty that he has hitherto ignored. It is the fear of the consequences of his act that leads him to try to escape responsibility for it. He pleads that he was tempted by his wife, and she, in turn, accuses the serpent of deceiving her. Jehovah takes no account of their excuses, but proceeds at once to pronounce sentence, beginning with the serpent. This animal is degraded from its original rank among its fellows and condemned to wriggle in the dust, exposed to the instinctive hatred of mankind. The woman learns that she is to suffer, especially in childbirth, and become the dependent of her husband. The punishment decreed for the man is that he be obliged to wring from a stubborn soil the subsistence that has hitherto cost him no effort. Finally, with the announcement that within a hundred and twenty years the ills decreed will culminate in death, Jehovah drives the disobedient pair from the garden.

In what respects, then, did Adam and Eve differ from their former selves when they were expelled from Paradise?

Their physical condition, it is plain, was greatly changed. They had heretofore enjoyed a painless, careless existence, with an unending vista of happiness. They now entered upon a scene of toil and suffering, with death and its terrors at no great distance in prospect.

They had also undergone a moral change. This has been described as a corruption, disorganization, of their nature. Does the story, or the author of it, warrant such a view? Disorganization of this sort would show itself (1) in a confused moral judgment, (2) a torpid conscience, (3) a weakened will, or (4)

unruly emotions. It can hardly be the idea of the Jahwist that the moral judgment of the first pair was disturbed by their transgression, for, according to his account, when they yielded to temptation they did not possess the knowledge of good and evil, and the operation of this faculty, when first acquired, was perfectly normal; as soon as their eyes were opened they saw that they were naked. He says, further, that on seeing that they were naked they at once, in obedience to a normal impulse, took measures to clothe themselves, thus indicating that their consciences were active and their wills unimpaired. On the fourth point, chap. 3:16 has been supposed to require a different conclusion. In it Jehovah is made to say to the woman, "Thy desire shall be toward thy husband and he shall rule over thee." Dillmann, after Knobel, paraphrases the passage as follows: "Thou shalt eagerly long for him, for intercourse with him;" and adds, of the subjection decreed, "This dependence, in itself, is to the author an evil; besides it occasions the repeated recurrence of pregnancy and childbirth." This interpretation, however, is by no means unobjectionable. The word rendered *desire* is found in only two other places in the Old Testament, Gen. 4:7 and Cant. 7:11 (10). In the former, where the text is doubtful, it can only mean *inclination*, and in the latter, where it is used of a man, it has the force of *affection*. There is ground, therefore, for the opinion that the author in this passage meant to make Jehovah say that the very tenderness of the woman for her husband would prove a disadvantage to her. But it is not necessary to insist upon a changed interpretation, for, granted that the old one is correct, it has not the significance alleged, since the increased sensuality of the woman is represented, not as the effect of partaking of the forbidden fruit, but as a part of the penalty for so doing. Thus it appears that the Jahwist does not teach that the moral nature of mankind was wrecked by the first disobedience, but, on the other hand, that it was this act which made the first pair independent moral beings. He must, therefore, have thought of them as leaving Paradise, in spite of the lapse of which they had been guilty, in possession of the same ability to obey the will of

Jehovah, however it might be revealed to them, which they had when they were created.

The discussion has now reached the limits proposed. It is not necessary to recapitulate the results obtained, but to prevent misunderstanding a word should be added concerning their relative importance. In the progress of the discussion certain details of the story, because they have been misinterpreted, had to be treated at greater length than others. It would be a mistake to suppose that those most fully discussed are the most important or that any of them are so important as the ideas underlying the whole. It is these last, the freedom of the will and the sovereignty of God, which gave to the story its value to those for whom it was originally written, and which still bear witness to the inspiration of its author.